

**Remarks at a Fundraiser for
Martha's Vineyard Hospital in
Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts
August 23, 1999**

Thank you very much, Dr. Sullivan and Mike. I feel like I was in pretty distinguished company tonight with them up here. I admire them both very much. Lou Sullivan was an outstanding Secretary of Health and Human Services, a great advocate in our Nation's struggle against AIDS, and one thing I particularly appreciated, one of the early strong voices in our efforts to protect our children from the dangers of teen smoking. And I thank you for all you did there and for what you're doing here.

I have always admired Mike Wallace. I like him more when he's boring in on someone besides me. *[Laughter]* But I want to tell you that he made a profoundly moving presentation recently at Tipper Gore's National Conference on Mental Health, which we helped to put together and which is something Hillary and I care a lot about. And I think we are moving to the point in our country where we see mental health problems like other health problems. And when that day arrives, it will be in no small measure because Mike Wallace had the courage to speak out about it. And I thank him for that as well. *[Applause]* Thank you.

Now, I want to say again, although Mike already alluded to it, I'm sorry Hillary is not here, but she is a little under the weather. And I want her to get well because she has a rigorous schedule ahead of her. *[Laughter]*

I want to thank Congressman Delahunt for being here, and the other elected officials, and all the members of the hospital board and the people here at Farm Neck who have been so kind to me over the years.

I would like to say a few things in a very straightforward way about this issue before you tonight. I spent a lot of my life trying to keep hospitals open that serve small populations. And this hospital is an interesting situation because, as Dr. Sullivan said, there are 14,000 year-round residents here and then up to 10 times that many here on any given day in the summertime. So, for most of the year, it's a small rural hospital in a county in Massachusetts that doesn't have a

particularly high per capita income, where, according to the information I've been given, 20 percent of the people have no health insurance. And then there's the summer and all the rest of us who are reasonably blessed in life, or we wouldn't be able to afford to come to Martha's Vineyard in the summertime. *[Laughter]* And we all want it to stay open and to do well.

And most of us, when we come here, come here because we don't want to think about anything except maybe walking on the beach or taking a sail or fighting our limitations out on this golf course, or whatever. *[Laughter]* We don't want to think about anything else—unless, like Mike, we get kidney stones or something else happens to us. But the people who run the hospital and the people who work at the hospital, they have to deal with the economics of modern health care, with the dilemma of the population base, and with the fact that—you know, they're there all the time. They deliver babies; they perform emergency surgery; they take care of the elderly people year round. They do things that need doing.

And there's not a person under this tent tonight that might not need this hospital sometime. Now, the plain fact is that, given the economics of modern medical care, I know there's—I don't want to get into all the things that have been in the paper about this—I'm not sure George Soros, Bob Rubin, and Alan Greenspan together could make this thing pay every month, every year, unless people like you are willing to help keep it open.

Now, of course, everything should be run as well as possible. But I'm telling you, I've been dealing with this for 20 years now, and I've kept some hospitals open when I was a Governor of a rural State, and I've seen some close. I've won some, and I've lost some. And let me just give you a couple of things to think about.

First of all, this hospital serves a county here on Martha's Vineyard that has 20 percent uninsured. I'll bet you anything—and I know that there is a health access coalition working on this, but I'll bet you anything that there are children on this island who are eligible for the CHIP program—the Children's Health Insurance Program—that was one of

the signal accomplishments of the bipartisan Balanced Budget Act of 1997, which provided funds for up to 5 million of the 10 million uninsured children in this country to have health insurance—which means payments to the hospital when they go there. And so far, even though the enrollments have really picked up, this is the first full year when all the States have had their programs in place. Only about one and a half million of those children have been enrolled, a little over one and a half million. And I'll bet anything some of them who haven't are here.

The second thing I'd like to say is, I bet a lot of the working families here, who work for very modest wages, especially in the off-season, or the farmers who have very limited incomes, their children, and maybe even the adults who are working, could be eligible for Medicaid, depending on what the Massachusetts rules are.

The third thing I would like to suggest is that—in Tennessee, the legislature provided an opportunity for working people who had no health insurance to actually buy into the Medicaid program. I'm embarrassed to tell you I don't know what options exist in Massachusetts for that, but we gave them permission to do it in Tennessee because they devised a way to show that they could do it on the allocation of Federal money they had, and we could do it here as well if it's not being done.

So we need to look to see what kinds of other ways we can infuse cash into the situation. But, as Mike said when we started, one of the things we need to remember is that we all need health care. And when you show up at the hospital, they don't ask for your party registration. That's why we're trying so hard to pass the Patients' Bill of Rights down in Washington. Everybody from the AMA to the nurses groups to virtually every health provider in the country is for it—because we recognize this is something that ought to unite us as a people.

Now, it is a challenge when you have small populations and you want high quality care and you want it there 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 52 weeks a year, whether there are 100,000 or 14,000 people here. But I'd like to say there are a lot of people who aren't here tonight on this island who make all of

our lives better. There are a lot of wonderful people who live here and work here year round, and who would never be able, themselves, to afford the kind of vacations that all of us take every year and take for granted. And they deserve good health care, too.

So I am very, very grateful to you. If there is anything else I can do, Dr. Sullivan, and anybody else here on the board, to try to explore what else we can do to enroll more people in covered programs that we maybe affect the income stream here, I'd be happy to do it. I will do what I can to help. I'm proud of you for being here. But what I'd like to say to you is, I think you ought to be prepared to come next year, too. *[Laughter]*

You know, folks, I've raised a lot of money in my life, and I'm not running for anything. *[Laughter]* So I can spend the rest of my life raising money for causes like this, which I like very well. But I say that because—based on 20 years of hard work.

Again, I hope the island and the community and all of you can unite behind this hospital. But I know—and I will do everything I can to help explore what else can be done here. But you need to make a long-term commitment—if this community wants this hospital—that it is something worth paying for, because you never know when you'll need it, and you certainly know that good people need it and access it every single day.

Thank you very much, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:16 p.m. at the Farm Neck Golf Club. In his remarks, he referred to journalist Mike Wallace; philanthropist George Soros; and former Secretary of the Treasury Robert E. Rubin. The President also referred to AMA, the American Medical Association.

Proclamation 7215—Women's Equality Day, 1999

August 24, 1999

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

The theme for America's celebration of the coming millennium is "honor the past—